

Chapter 6

University of South Florida

Lily Todorinova

USF Tampa Library, University of South Florida, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Throughout the history of the University of South Florida Libraries, instruction and reference have coexisted in one department, currently known as Academic Services, and as a result, have influenced each other operationally and conceptually. Desk staffing, for example, has been affected by patterns of classroom scheduling, by placing an additional librarian at the desk per night, in case they are needed to teach an incoming class. This has been driven by a philosophy of instruction that has focused on the one-shot orientation and expediency. Customization and active learning techniques have always been employed by instructional librarians, but have become more consistent over time. The influence of instructional methodology on reference, and vice versa, is strongly driven by the library's long-standing relationship with First Year Composition (FYC). Like many academic libraries, USF has strived to have a visible and active role in the academic success of its users, while managing demand for services with quality and currency. Reference and instruction have been at the forefront of these efforts. Influenced by the Learning Commons Model and philosophy, Academic Services has attempted a number of new ways of delivering public services, which have recently culminated in a tiered, "on-call," model of reference, with an increased reliance on virtual chat, and an assignment-specific and course-integrated method of instruction, supported by the growing production of online learning objects and services. The future of reference and instruction at USF Libraries will undoubtedly be a product of these changes and the continuous effort to redefine public services.

OBJECTIVES OF THE CHAPTER

- The reader will recognize Learning Commons elements in the reference and instruction programs at the USF Tampa Library.
- The reader will explore the relationship between reference and instruction and, in particular, the influence of the First Year Composition Program on both services.
- The readers will benefit from a discussion on the challenges, directions, and future

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considerations for reference and instruction at the USF Libraries and similar academic institutions.

ORGANIZATIONAL BACKGROUND

The University of South Florida (USF) is a large urban research university with an approximate enrollment of 47,000 students, 40,000 of which are based at the Tampa Campus.

The USF Library system is comprised of the Tampa campus libraries, which are the main library and the Louise de la Parte Florida Mental Health Institute Research Library (FMHI), both of which are on the Tampa campus, as well as the Sarasota-Manatee library branch. The main library is centrally located in the Tampa campus and houses the majority of the system's print collection (around 1.5 million volumes), as well as Special & Digital Collections. The library also has a large and expanding electronic collection of around 700 databases and over 30,000 journal subscriptions, which is heavily employed by USF users and the community, on campus and remotely. The institution has around 82 professional and 103 support staff in 6 departments, including: Academic Services, Academic Resources, Special & Digital Collections, Interlibrary Loan, Administration, and Office of Development. The Academic Services department carries on the functions of circulation, reference, and instruction and has 17 employees, including 10 full-time and one part-time reference and instruction librarians.

As the USF Library is in the process of growing into an Association of Research Libraries (ARL) institution, its goals are focused on distinction and innovation, the advancement of knowledge across academic communities and departments, building strong relationships with faculty and students, enhancing information literacy through technology, and maintaining and creating collections of national distinction and depth. The library is also proactively expanding its digital

commons and pursuing open-access publishing. In 2009, the first and second floors of the library were transformed into a Learning Commons, housing learner-centric services, such as writing and tutoring. In 2010, the first floor of the library was remodeled, increasing furniture for study space and collaboration. The building, in order to accommodate heavy traffic and use (around 4800 visitors per day), is now open 24/5.

The USF Tampa Library reference desk is one of eight service points, along with Circulation, Ask Desk, Periodicals, and Special Collections. There are three additional non-library service desks also located within the library: Information Technology (IT) and the USF Writing Center on the first floor and Tutoring Services on the second floor. The reference desk is staffed by a combination of Graduate Assistants (GAs) and librarians. The services offered at the desk include in-person walk-ins, chat, email, texting, and phone. The current model of services is characteristic of the Learning Commons and the collocation of the library reference desk with other academic support units, such as the Writing Center and Information Technology (IT).

SETTING THE STAGE: REFERENCE

Reference services at the USF Tampa Libraries have gone through significant transformations and experimentations. The history of the reference desk itself marks a discernible effort to self-define through trying out various models that have emerged from the Learning Commons, such as the combining of service points with the Information Technology (IT) desk, experimenting with the concept of a "Research Suite" for graduate students and faculty, collocating with the Writing Center and, most recently, a tiered approach to reference. The main factors that have impacted reference services at USF Tampa Library are 1) technological changes, 2) ideological shifts, reflected in the location and staffing of the reference

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